



NEWSLETTER

Winter 2018



Our new tractor bought with help from the generous donation from the East Wickham and Welling War Memorial Trust

Welcome

Words by Claire Duncombe

Welcome to this winter edition of farm news. There have been a number of new additions to the farm lately in both animal and mechanical form. Recent visitors to the farm will not have been able to miss the newly acquired smart shiny Massey Ferguson tractor which has already helped to take some of the strain of haymaking over the long hot summer. The tractor, along with the new fully accessible trailer, are also providing great opportunities for passengers to see more of the farm.

The new livestock additions on the farm are four cows from Dorset, 2 Longhorns, a Red Devon and an Aberdeen Angus and 3 of them are due to calve in the spring (pages 4-5). The young farmers have been enthusiastically learning about livestock care and their efforts at showing some of the animals resulted in a fine collection of rosettes at the Harvest Festival (page 8).

The education team have been busy developing and running a series of new events this year and the addition of the new Stickman Trail around the farm offers great opportunities for adventure and discovery to young visitors. The 'Tommies and Tractors' event brought to life some elements of WW1 and gave visitors a fascinating insight into life at the time (pages 6-7).

We would like to take this opportunity wish you all a very Merry Christmas and Happy New Year and we hope to see you down on the farm soon. Over the festive period the farm will be open as usual with the exception of Christmas day and Boxing day.

THE WOODLANDS FARM TRUST

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Events Committee News

Words by Gill Rowlands and Maggie Jones, photo by Maggie Jones

As most members know, we aim to run four shows every year. Each show has a distinct personality and our many supporters do enjoy them, well they must as they come back so often. Here's the news about the latest three.

Summer show, our Open Farm Day was blessed with fine weather, which enticed plenty of people out to attend. We did not put stalls on the Arena field this time and found the more compact layout attractive and easier to manage. Being Open Farm Sunday the opportunity to use our new tractor with the new trailer and show people around our fields was great. The tractor theme continued with our display of vintage tractors (our old ones joined by the two good old Fergies, courtesy of Terry's Autos) and the café even had tractor shaped biscuits. The new "Tractor Ted" trail proved a great hit with the children, while our Young Farmers demonstrated again what an asset they are proving to be, showing sheep for the public.

Apple Day came with rain, but our devoted supporters came in to buy heritage and new, interesting varieties of apples and pears. We cannot grow enough ourselves, so we source them from Pippins in Kent, who grow a great range of fascinating fruit trees. Our fresh apple juice was as popular as ever and old and young enjoyed trying out the crusher and press – under strict supervision of course. We welcomed the Pretty Little Tea Company who provided an excellent range of drinks and snacks, their first time at the farm.

The Christmas Show's star is, of course, Father Christmas, and he was as popular as ever. However he risked being upstaged by a giant snowman, who was in no danger of melting in the rather mild December day, as he was made of wood.

Despite the predictable seasonal nature of our shows, we ring the changes with music, so 'Arry and the 'At stands were popular in the summer, but we stayed with tradition for Apple Day with our old friends Skinner's Rats. Christmas was marked by the Rock Choir, who gave excellent and varied, but very appropriate sessions on the day.

So – see you at Lambing Day – exact date in April to be announced – watch the website.

Livestock News

Words by Dai Jones , photos by Dai Jones and Maggie Jones

Farming Update 2018

2018 has been a pretty interesting year on the farm, dominated by weather, well it wouldn't be a farm update without me mentioning the weather!

The winter and early spring were exceptionally wet and cold, even having some snow in early March. This made it impossible to turn out the ewes and lambs to the fields I wanted to as they would have made a mess of the soaking wet ground, causing a mud bath! Of course from mid May onwards hot and dry weather predominated, which was great initially but by the beginning of July it had caused the grass to stop growing.



Hillview on the 1st March 2018

When you have over 200 sheep and 8 head of cattle grazing the fields this becomes a problem. We had to start feeding our winter stock of hay in July when we wouldn't normally start feeding hay until November/December. Fortunately the dry weather made hay making straightforward, no need to worry about rain, but

carrying bales in 30C heat wasn't easy! The hay crop was good quality though and, as we make hay to sell, we had plenty to feed our animals over summer and still have enough for the winter, but we'll be making less money as our animals have eaten hay that we would have sold. That's enough about the weather, though I'm sure it will get mentioned later, so how about some animal news instead!



Carrying hay in the heat produced visions of being followed by hay bales!

Animal News

Our new cattle shed, which was up and running by the end of last winter will have some new tenants this winter. Four cows have arrived from Dorset, two Longhorns, a Red Devon and an Aberdeen Angus cross Devon cow, three are in calf and are due in the spring. I hope to get our British White cows back in calf shortly by AI (artificial insemination) so there maybe quite a few calves around next year. We'll be selling some our younger stock at Ashford market before Christmas.



Dorset arrivals dining out in London!

Lambing went well this year thanks to the help of lots of volunteers.

Lambing would have been over quite quickly if hadn't been for a couple of last year's Manx lambs, one of whom managed to break in with the Lleyr ram and another getting in lamb to the Manx ram when he broke in for a few days over Christmas! As a result our last lamb was in mid-May after starting in mid-March! Getting lambs to the right weight has been difficult due to the lack of grass, they've taken longer to grow meaning we're selling later in the year when the price is lower.

We didn't have much luck with pigs this year and so we ended up selling both the sow and the boar after they failed to produce piglets between them. The plan is to buy some more pigs in the near future when we can get the right stock at the right time, and I suppose the right price!

Other news

I can't let my farm update pass without mentioning our new tractor and trailer bought with the generous donations of the East Wickham and Welling War Memorial Trust and the Co-op. They both been used a great deal together taking visitors around the fields, as well as the tractor making the carrying of big round bales easier at hay time, (air-conditioning in the hot weather as well!)

Education Report

Words and photos by Hannah Ricketts

This year along with our normal school visits, toddler club and holiday activities we have had two different and exciting collaborations, one with East Wickham and Welling War Memorial Trust (EWWMT) and one with Social Farms and Gardens.

Earlier in the year EWWMT kindly donated funds towards the purchase of a new Massey Ferguson Tractor for the farm. Working in collaboration with EWWMT the farm held an event in July called 'Tommies and Tractors – Food, farming and the courageous creatures of the First World War.' This event was to commemorate the lives of the local farm workers of the Welling area who gave their lives in the First World War as well as discover how the war effected farming at the time. On the day visiting families had the opportunity to go on a tractor ride and discover how the area would have looked around the time of the Great War. Children could have a go at traditional games and discover what they would have eaten at the time as well as make a poppy to go on our remembrance tractor. There was a trail teaching visitors about the animals which were used during the war, from the commonly known horses to the less common – slugs!

Who would have known that a common garden slug could be used to help detect poisonous gases and thus save soldiers' lives! It was also a great opportunity to show the visiting public some of the traditional farm machinery that would have been used and thus illustrate how important the tractor has become for farming. It was only during WW1 when food production became a priority that the government decided to spend \$3 million to buy British and American tractors to fill the void left by the men who had gone to war. This started a new era of farming. You can see our new Massey Ferguson tractor, who is called Tommy, around on the farm.

We are very excited to have been chosen by Social Farms and Gardens to host the Stick Man Activity Trail. Popular character, Stick Man, based on the children's picture book written by Julia Donaldson and illustrated by Axel Scheffler, features in this new free activity trail which aims to encourage children to get outdoors and explore the natural world. Woodlands Farm was chosen to host the trail as part of a nationwide scheme supported by Stick Man brand owner Magic Light Pictures and Social Farms & Gardens, a charity which promotes land-based activities that encourage learning and improved well-being.

The self-guided trail offers an interactive learning experience for three to seven year-olds and has been designed to help children go on their own adventure with the stick man character. Brightly coloured boards featuring Stick Man and other

characters from the picture book will be used alongside an activity pack, with children able to claim a Stick Man Trail Certificate for completing the trail. Visitors to the farm can either download all they need from our website for free, or alternatively we have activity packs available to buy at the farm for £2.50. These include all you need for the trail, plus a colouring sheet, colouring pencils, a sticker and pipe cleaners and wool so you can create your very own Stick Man. The Stick Man Trail was launched officially in August with a day of activities, including minibeast hunts, story sessions and environmental art.



Stickman and his stick family

The trail will be at Woodlands Farm until the end of 2019 so you can come along anytime the farm is open to have a go, also keep an eye out for special Stick Man events throughout the year.



Look out for Stick Man Trail signs around the farm

News from the Young Farmers

Words and photos by Kate Bygrave



Kate Bygrave, Young Farmers Leader

Firstly, I would like to take this opportunity to introduce myself. My name is Kate Bygrave, and I am the new Young Farmers Leader at The Woodlands Farm Trust. I started in the role in June.

I have been working with children, young people and adults outdoors for the past 15 years in a variety of roles, teaching outdoor skills, bush craft, horticulture and conservation management. During the week I work for the City of London Open Spaces Department teaching young people about the environment and conservation in sessions designed to engage young Londoners with their green spaces. I am really enjoying being part of The Woodlands Farm Trust and I'm looking forward to developing the Young Farmers Club.

London Harvest Festival 2018

The Woodlands Farm Trust hosted this year's Harvest Festival, coming in 3rd place overall for all the categories. The young farmers took part showing a variety of animals from the farm and receiving a lot of rosettes, including first place for our very own Bob, winner of the equine class (and 3rd place overall). The day was a great success with hundreds of visitors from other city farms and across London making their way down to the farm to view the animals and displays, take part in workshops and enjoy the weather. A huge thank you and congratulations for everyone who was involved with making the day such a huge success.



1st Prize winner Bob being lead by one of our young farmers

Coming up

The young farmers will be working on the new raised bed area where the team will have two of the beds for growing fruit, vegetables and flowers to learn about horticulture and arable farming, as well as allowing us to have produce for future shows.

Wildlife

Words and photos by Hannah Ricketts

Volunteers and staff at the farm continue to monitor the different wildlife at the farm through a variety of citizen science surveys. Citizen science surveys are wildlife surveys arranged by various organisations with a set methodology that anyone can follow. The reason we choose to do this at the farm is as we are all enthusiastic amateurs it gives us a starting point for running our surveys. It is also good that we can contribute data about the farms wildlife to national surveys. Below are details of the main citizen science surveys we take part in.

The survey season normally starts in February with the Big Farmland Bird Count. This is organised by the Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust and involves volunteers standing in the fields for half an hour and recording the different bird species they see. Our most common species seen in the half hour were Wood Pigeon and Carrion Crow, the highlight was the green woodpecker.

As the year progresses we move onto our Bumblebee surveys. These are run in conjunction with the Bumblebee Conservation Trust. We do a monthly walk round the farm between March and October. This year we have seen a dramatic decrease in the number of bumblebees observed. We had thought this could be due to 'The Beast from the East' as this occurred at the time when many Bumblebee queens would have been starting to emerge. Although they are still waiting for all results to be submitted The Bumblebee Conservation Trust seem to be seeing the same pattern in national results, in addition the hot summer meant the plants were producing less nectar which would also effect the bees.



Bumblebees busy on an *Eryngium* flower

From April through to June we take part in the National Amphibian and Reptile Recording Scheme (NARRS). During these few months we have to survey our pond 4 times. Using 3 different techniques we look for the amphibians living in our

ponds. The surveys techniques we use are: netting (using a pond dipping net to see what we find), visual search (looking under logs near the pond) and a torchlight survey (where we shine a torch into the pond at night and you can see any amphibians swimming around). Over the 4 surveys we see the changes as the season progresses – from finding eggs on our first surveys to a lot of young tadpoles and newt efts (young newts) later in the surveys. We most commonly find smooth newts, but have also found common frogs and toads in some years.

In July we take part in the Bat Conservation Trust field survey. This involves a walk around the farm, once at the beginning of the month and once near the end of the month. The walk starts 20 minutes after sunset and during this we are concentrating on finding 4 main species of bat – Noctule, Seotine, Common Pipistrelle and Soprano Pipistrelle. The walk is broken down into walks and 2 minute ‘stops’. On the walks we are listening for noctule and serotine which are large bats which call at a lower frequency. On the ‘stops’ we are listening for the pipistrelle bats – these call at a higher frequency. This year we had one of our most successful bat surveys with large numbers of both types of Pipistrelles and Noctules being heard.



Wildlife volunteers recording survey results

If you are interested in becoming a wildlife volunteer then please email education@thewoodlandsfarmtrust.org

Apple Press Gang

Words by Dave Wright, photos by Maggie Jones

It's Apple Day/ Juice for sale, lots of it! Over the years the quantity has gone up and with it the effort and organisation. There is no magic apple juice pipeline. But there are apple press gangs and each year a unique production formula, which involves a number of volunteers, swings into action.

First we need to collect the apples, about 400kg of them! On the Friday before Apple Day a team armed with litter pickers, handled bags and large planter tubs descend on Pippins Orchard, Pembury, Kent to wend their ways around and along the rows of choice heritage trees, plucking unpicked and unwanted (by the grower) fruit from under their shadows. It's where we collect the boxed apples for sale too. On our return we have the animal trailer full of fruit.

We go for the apples we know will blend well to make a lively and interesting juice, tasting as we go (just to be sure). It's quite a mixture of varieties, colours and aromas. We weigh them on a scale, total weight over 400kg. We have already loaded 47 boxes too. That's around



A selection of the apples grown in our own orchard

another 600kg. Call it a tonne or 2,200lbs or 157 stone or nearly 20cwt in old money. It all has to be shifted. With the animal carrier stuffed to the gunwales with apples boxed and bucketed we wave farewell for another year to the farmer and his dog, the barn shop and the lines of trees still bearing fruit.

With so many apples and varieties in one space the scent becomes intoxicating. Trying to describe the normally surreptitious floral scents and complex overtones would take an essay of metaphors. Next time just smell them for yourself and marvel!

So now the production organisation. Before the day the mechanics of the production line need to be assembled, checked and ideally tested (but not this year). There are two header tanks filled with water; the first with sterilizer (Milton) where the apples are scrubbed and washed, the second a rinse tank complete with colanders and collecting buckets.

As mentioned earlier with so many varieties of apples there are many colours and shades. Such a spectacle gives delight to some of our visitors. So much so, that some want to get in the tanks with the apples! Others join in with the washing and scrubbing.

Next comes the chopping section. A table with chopping boards, knives and another set of collecting buckets. These feed the crushers: one a manual hand-cranked version for child engagement, the other is an electric "Heath-Robinson" device (designed and built by Terry Ford) powered by a washing machine motor and very effective it is too! These crushers produce large trugs of macerated apple ready for the press.



Young volunteers working the apple crusher

Each pressing takes around 10Kg of "mash" and produces around 3 or 4 litres of juice. The apple press is a mechanical marvel and allows spectator participation by turning the threaded screw onto the blocks pressing down onto the bulk of apple contained in a mesh bag. This mesh bag allows easy removal of the spent pulp and into the bins for later animal feeding.

The turning of the press is always popular with children. It's great to see the look of wonder and fun on their faces when they can see that their actions produce the flowing juice. Sometimes it's difficult to get them to stop and let another have a go. The juice flows into collecting buckets and jugs which are decanted on the selling table for public consumption.

So the production line was in place we just needed er? 1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10, umm, enough people to make it work!

Cue the Apple Press Gang. Some new faces, some young farmers, some relatives and some unexpected late transfers. But we did it. This year we produced around 120 litres and about 100 of them in cups or bottles. All 400kgs processed, fine quality juice, contented customers, amused children and some over to be stored for spiced apple juice at the Christmas Fayre.

Many photos taken and once they overcome the strange look of real apple juice its

“Wow”, “Ooh that’s lovely”, “Mmmmm”, wide eyes, glug, glug, glug.

I love Apple Day even if it is non-stop graft, if only to see reaction of people when they taste and enjoy real apple juice. Maybe then they will realise the juice in the shops isn’t a patch on the real stuff, come back for more and support our great British apple growers.

Three Cheers for the Apple Press Gang! Great team work makes great juice.

Conservation Update

Words and photos by Dave Wright

The 2018 hedgelaying season is well under way. We are continuing the main track hedge from where we left off last year and propose to use the dipping pond hedge as a training hedge later on. If we get on really well (with favourable weather, log production, etc.) then other hedges are on the agenda, such as Shooters Hill and Bellgrove Road.

If you are interested in having a go or simply lending a hand then please contact me (Dave the Hedge) via the office or farm email admin@thewoodlandsfarmtrust.org or simply leave your details in the Mess Room for my attention.



A section of recently layed hedge

Bird Report

Words: David Jones, photo by Alex Murley

For various reasons there have been relatively few bird observations this autumn. So for this issue there will be a change of format, with a combined Autumn / Winter report in the next edition. Hopefully this will get to you before Christmas, making its subject matter appropriate for the season.

A relatively recent poll among birdwatchers put the Robin as England's favourite bird. It is also the non-food bird most associated with Christmas. This association certainly goes back to Victorian times, as early Christmas Cards show; and in the medieval Church the Robin was associated with the easing of Christ's suffering on the cross, but why the Robin? Robins are unusual in that they sing in the autumn/early winter to claim their territories and attract a mate before breeding gets underway in late winter/early spring. They are very aggressive at this time of year and will fight other Robins to the death to defend a territory or mate. In fact they are not at all gregarious with other Robins and this is reflected in their Latin name *Erithacus rubecula*: Greek/Latin for solitary (bird) with a red breast. They are also not only colourful during a drab time of year but are far from shy of humans. Their well known habit of appearing around digging gardeners may not be viewed as so friendly when it is realised that Robins are natural to woodland and will follow animals such as deer and pigs as they rummage through the undergrowth, eating any insects, worms or insect eggs that they unearth or disturb. To a Robin we are just a strange upright Pig!

Woodlands Farm has several Robin territories, most noticeably around the allotments, where they benefit from the no poison policy and the nearby farm animals. One brave individual used to regularly enter the volunteers' messroom, much to the delight and amusement of all. Several years later this was still happening, but as Robins are not long lived birds this is unlikely to be the same individual. However, people would have been less amused in the past as a Robin entering the house was considered a harbinger of death.

Modern Robin observation has shown that our apparently resident Robin population is not as local as was once thought. British Robins are noticeably less afraid of humans than Robins in continental Europe. Many Robins arrive in Britain from continental Europe in the winter to make use of our usually milder winter. These Robins usually stay in our woods but more and more are venturing into gardens and some are taking this habit back to France, Holland and Germany. Confusingly some of our Robins move south west in winter and some even move south into western France.

There will be two guided bird walks this spring: Sunday 28th April 2019 and Sunday 5th May 2019. Both walks will start at 10am. Meet in the farm yard by the first barn / volunteers' messroom. Bring appropriate clothing and footwear and if possible a pair of binoculars. The walk will be over rough ground that could be wet and a couple of fence steps will have to be negotiated. In the event of heavy rain or strong winds the event will be cancelled.



A Robin, England's favourite bird

Photo Gallery



Tommy the tractor doing great service on Open Farm Sunday



A Young Farmer showing a prizewinning sheep



One of our new Longhorn cows



The Christmas Fair wood stall